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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1402
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MONROVIA 000610

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W PDAVIS, AF/EPS CTRIMBLE, EB/ESC
SSAARNIO, INR/AA BGRAVES

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [EWWT](#) [LI](#) [PGOV](#) [PHSA](#)

SUBJECT: SHIP "STOLEN" FROM LIBERIAN WATERS NOT AN
INDICATION OF PIRACY

REF: MONROVIA 440

1. (SBU) Summary: On May 11, unknown assailants "stole" the Saint Vincent-flagged M/V "Tahoma Reefer" from its anchorage in Liberian waters and proceeded to tow the vessel towards the Ivory Coast. United Nations Police (UNPOL) and the Liberian National Police (LNP) arrested two individuals (one of them an LNP officer) in connection with the theft, and United Nations Mission to Liberia (UNMIL) tracked the vessel until it disappeared near the border on May 13. Representatives of the ship's owners fueled a press frenzy with suggestions of piracy and terrorism, but the ship's storied history suggests the exact circumstances of the ship's removal is as mysterious as its current whereabouts. The Freeport of Monrovia does have security issues to resolve, but the "Tahoma Reefer" incident does not suggest that piracy is an issue in Liberia or that commercial vessels run any new dangers in using the Freeport of Monrovia. End Summary.

2. (U) In August 2006, the M/V Tahoma Reefer caught fire while unloading frozen fish at the Freeport of Monrovia. The fire was extinguished and the vessel was towed out of the harbor basin to outer anchorage with the assistance of the US Navy, which happened to have a vessel in port. The National Port Authority (NPA) then instructed the local agents of the vessel (Joden Shipping and Stevedoring) to relocate the vessel outside the port's shipping channel. After several months without response, during which the vessel was reportedly looted and damaged, the NPA relocated the vessel three nautical miles outside the port's approach path in January 2007. According to a local representative, in February 2007 the Defendo Maritime Consulting LTD Company bought the ship and sent its representative, Shteynberg Volodimir, a Ukrainian-national, to Monrovia. (Note: Embassy is unable to verify actual ownership of the vessel. End note.)

3. (SBU) According to UNPOL Acting Police Commissioner G. M. DuToit, the LNP received reports of nefarious activity (perhaps drugs or weapons) on board the vessel. The LNP reportedly boarded the ship on May 7 but found nothing. On May 8, Mr. Volodimir says he received a call that the boat had been attacked and that his 100-man crew was held hostage (Note: UNPOL advises that the boat had no crew and that Mr. Volodimir is not the ship's captain as he claims). UNPOL deployed police units to the coastline where the alleged attackers were expected to return and arrested two people, one of them an LNP officer, charging them with theft. On May 11, Volodimir reported the boat was "stolen" and UN helicopters confirmed sighting the vessel as it was towed

down the Liberian coast. Because neither the GOL nor the UN has any marine resources, the UN could not interdict the boat and was only able to monitor its path. The UN tracked the boat until the evening of May 13 when the boat was expected to cross the Ivory Coast border. Instead, the boat disappeared and despite efforts on both sides of the border, the boat remains missing. UN Missions in both Liberia and the Ivory Coast have searched for the ship as recently as May 21 without success.

¶4. (SBU) Self-proclaimed "Captain" Volodimir lashed out at the UN and the LNP in the press for their inability to stop this slow-moving crime, and news of the theft quickly triggered rumors of piracy along the West African coast. Volodimir spun a melodramatic tale of extortion, assault and theft, but UNPOL says the story is so full of holes, they are uncertain what the real story is. According to UNPOL, ownership of the boat is in dispute and the owners' portrayal of the saga suggest they may be attempting to lay the basis for an insurance claim.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The Freeport of Monrovia is rife with problems (reftel) but fortunately, piracy is not currently a major issue. Because of its strategic importance, UNMIL protects the port from incursion on land, while the NPA does what it can to safeguard property on the port premises. But port infrastructure is antiquated, management oversight is lax, and the GOL does not have the capacity for marine patrols. At locations outside port waters, however, ship owners - rather than the GOL (or the UN) - are responsible for security, and it is clear that the owners of the M/V Tahoma Reefer did little to stop (and may have encouraged) its theft. It is unfortunate that the legend of the Tahoma Reefer has spawned rumors of piracy in Liberia at a time when

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the NPA is seeking to improve its reputation. The Tahoma Reefer incident is a reminder that the Freeport of Monrovia has many problems, but is not a sign of any additional threat or increase in danger for shipping to/from Liberia. End comment.

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